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ABSTRACT

Under the auspices of the California State Department of Education, conferences were held in August of 1966 and April of 1967 "by outstanding Mexican American educators" who brought forth questions and proposed solutions to the need for a different kind of quality education for the student of Mexican descent. This document summarizes those conferences, which dealt with all Mexican American students--immigrant children, the children of migrant workers, and the various generations of students living in homogeneous communities composed of persons of Mexican descent. The major thrust of the conferences was the "low educational attainment of the Mexican-American." Among the topics discussed were (1) the Mexican American education problem, (2) points of view on the place of Mexican American culture in California, (3) the status of current educational programs for Mexican American students, (4) curriculum modification for Mexican American students, (5) important considerations for Mexican American education programs, and (6) suggestions for different levels of instruction. The document concludes with a discussion on counseling and guidance, staff training, and school-community relations. (EL)

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THE EDUCATION OF THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN

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A Summary of the Proceedings of the Lake Arrowhead and Anaheim Conferences

CALIFORNIA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Max Rafferty—Superintendent of Public Instruction
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PREFACE

For several days in August of 1966 at Lake Arrowhead and again during a weekend in April of 1967 at Anaheim, a group of outstanding Mexican-American educators were brought together under the auspices of the California State Department of Education's Mexican-American Education Research Project to examine the questions and issues that vitally affect the educational opportunities of students of Mexican descent.

The educators present at the two conferences were concerned about the lack of sufficient research data available in the area of the education of the Mexican-American. However, they were confident that their collective experience and personal observations, coupled with available research data, warranted serious attention by the education system. The questions raised and the possible solutions proposed at the conferences present an effective argument for the need for a different kind of quality education for the student of Mexican descent. This publication is a summary of those two conferences.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Mexican-American Education Research Project gratefully acknowledges the efforts of leaders of Mexican descent from many disciplines who met to examine the school and community problems of Mexican-American youth.

The following educators attended the conferences at Lake Arrowhead in August, 1966, and at Anaheim in April, 1967; those whose names are preceded with an asterisk were present at both meetings:

Lake Arrowhead

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Responsibility for summarizing the two conferences was undertaken by Daniel Gomez, who was assisted by Roger Anton, Maria Olsen, Daniel Reyes, Edward Moreno, and Marcos de Leon, all of whose efforts are gratefully acknowledged.

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The Mexican-American Education Problem

The "universe" under discussion at the Mexican-American Education Research Project's Lake Arrowhead and Anaheim conferences was defined to include all Mexican-American students -- the immigrant child, the children of migrant workers, and the various generations of students living in homogeneous communities composed of persons of Mexican descent.

The major problem was identified as the "low educational attainment of the Mexican-American," which underlies the large numbers of economically impoverished Mexican-American families, the serious social problems of that segment of the community, and the insufficient supply of effective Mexican-American leaders. The Mexican-American education problem must be resolved if there is to be improvement in the intellectual, cultural, and socioeconomic position of the whole society, for it is California's largest and most complex educational problem.

It is essential that the causes of, and possible solutions to, the major educational difficulties facing Mexican-Americans be correctly identified and that these factors be understood by the education community. Teachers, administrators, and school board members must be made aware of the need for changes in the educational programs to ensure Mexican-American students an opportunity to experience success in school and in life.

The isolation of Mexican-American children and youth from many Anglo teachers, adults, and peers is due in large measure to insufficient understanding of the differences in cultural attitudes and psychological conditions of the Mexican-American. An awareness of these differences is of central importance in the development of a quality education program.

Mexican-American educators are not promoting a "special interest group," but rather are attempting to ensure that boards of education et al become truly cognizant of the problems involved in teaching the Mexican-American and give this problem its due amount of attention.

Effective guidance of Mexican-American students is largely lacking, resulting in isolation and ineffective academic performance by the students and a severe loss to society as a whole. Thus, drastic changes in curriculum, methodology, pupil personnel practices, teacher training, and community relations programs are necessary to meet the particular needs of this unique group. It is incumbent upon our educational system to make sure that <u>all</u> human resources are fully utilized.

POINTS OF VIEW ON THE PLACE OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN CULTURE IN CALIFORNIA

One of the first statements made at the Lake Arrowhead Conference pointed to the ambivalence that the Mexican-American educators have about keeping these children "Mexican." One point of view held that the Mexican-American must fit into the American society -- not that of Mexico. "Our Mexican-American students," it was pointed out, "are not being reared in a truly 'Mexican' culture, and, for many of them, much of what is called 'heritage' is boring stuff. Therefore, our first aim should be total assimilation without reference to Mexican cultural traits, traditions, or values."

A second viewpoint took note of the quality of life in the Mexican-American barrio. It pointed to the poor education the students of the barrio receive, which, along with other negative aspects, forces those who can afford to move to do so in order to secure a better life for their children. If the schools of the barrio were able to provide the children with a mastery of subjects such as English and mathematics -- tools necessary for our complex commercial and technological setting -- then this would encourage many parents to stay and help improve the general quality of life in the barrio. This view holds that there is value in having the school make the Mexican cultural heritage known to its pupils as a form of educational enrichment, but that the priority of the instructional program must be the development of economically salable skills.

Another segment of the group argued persuasively that reducing the Mexican-American education problem to one of economics is an oversimplification. "Man does not live by bread alone." He needs a spiritual or ideological diet as well as occupational skills.

Others called for a broader view of Mexican life in the Southwest. "The Southwest may be viewed," they pointed out, "as an extension of Mexican and Hispanic culture." The nations south of the Rio Grande have already had an impact on our civilization, and, with improved communications and transportation, increased commercial intercourse will mean increased cultural contact between the United States and Latin America. Thousands of Mexican-Americans could play an important part in bringing these two cultures together harmoniously if they were trained for the task. Mexican-American students begin life with an important asset: their bilingual-bicultural knowledge. As such they have two souls and are capable of intimately knowing people with two distinct world views. To dissipate these resources or to fail to cultivate them would be a gross error and waste on the part of the United States. Unguided acculturation of today's Mexican-American in California threatens to waste his potential value to the nation's future. The school must therefore take "Mexican" cultural traits and values into account when planning educational programs for these students. The school should capitalize on the existing assets of the Mexican-American rather than attempt to force these youth into a planned homogeneous culture in which they may not have the opportunity to develop the ability to cope with ever-changing problems.

The Mexican-American of early California had no doubts about his worth and the value of his language. It was understood by many Mexicans, after

the war between Mexico and the United States, that Spanish would be recognized as one of the languages of the Southwest and that Hispanic cultural customs would be retained. There is even perhaps some legal evidence that supports this view. However, the value system of the Anglo culture came to regard Spanish as inferior and sought the imposition of Anglo values to wash away the stains of foreign elements in California's social fabric. Naturally, this was to cause confusion, doubt, and anxiety in the Mexican-American's mind. The effects of the psychological tremors, coupled with other telling factors, have no doubt helped to undermine the Mexican-American student's ability to perform effectively in the classroom. Today, perhaps more important than anything else, these things must be understood by "Juanito's teacher," especially if he is not acquainted with the history of the Southwest and its Hispanic influence. The important tactical question is this: "How can the teacher help these students adapt successfully to a different culture without destroying their bilingual ability and without making them feel ashamed of the word 'Mexican'?" In too many of our schools, this feeling of shame or uncertainty about his heritage leads the Mexican-American child to discriminate against his Mexican peer who is a recent arrival to California and the United States.

THE STATUS OF CURRENT EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR MEXICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS

During the conference proceedings, it became increasingly apparent that the instructional programs in those schools serving Mexican-American communities and other proposals for tackling the major problem were designed to integrate or fully assimilate the Mexican-American into the Anglo culture without sufficient consideration for preserving his bilingual and bicultural assets.

Compensatory education programs were among the first to be singled out for criticism. The criticisms were based upon observations made in schools where Mexican-Americans predominate. One major criticism was that new compensatory education programs have been appended to the regular instructional program without considering their integral relationship to the total curriculum. "Headstart" and "English-as-a-second-language" programs were cited as innovations that have not notably altered the curriculum. Questions such as the following were asked: "What happens to the child who receives special attention in something like 'Headstart' when he gets into the regular school program?" "What provision does the regular instructional program make for building on these special experiences or for taking into account the child's particular bilingual-bicultural characteristics?" Since no special provisions were noted by members of the group who had observed compensatory education programs, it was recommended that greater attention be given to this aspect of the educational program.

Some of the Mexican-American educators working solely in the area of compensatory education stated that they had experienced repeated frustration in attempting to bring about what they felt were needed changes in the instructional programs for Mexican-American students. The State Department of

Education's Office of Compensatory Education, they noted, also had difficulty in convincing school districts to modify instructional programs for Mexican-American students. Another limiting factor cited was the uncertainty of funding for compensatory education programs. Finally, there was a feeling that an unequal emphasis was being given to compensatory education programs for other ethnic groups over those for the Mexican-Americans, especially in large urban centers.

After due deliberation, the following statements on compensatory education were set forth:

- Compensatory education is not meeting the needs for which it was intended because of the following factors:

  Compensatory education threatens to divert school districts from their responsibilities for culturally different youth. In some cases there is an undesirable separation of responsibility for compensatory education in the regular district program and for special instructional programs for the disadvantaged. Some school districts are reluctant to bring about the integration of students in these special programs and students in the regular instructional programs.

  Many compensatory education programs are defective due to:

  1. Hasty organization and lack of direction
  2. Use of unqualified personnel to administer compensatory education programs
  3. Lack of attention to creative education rather than "more of the same"

- Compensatory education should consider the following factors:

  Mexican-Americans, as the largest California minority, have unique instructional problems and require more assistance in the form of compensatory education programs than other groups.

  Programs should not lead to segregation in the guise of "separation in order to provide maximum concentration of effort."

  Follow-up studies of recipients of compensatory education should be conducted to determine the effectiveness of existing compensatory education programs in relation to the special needs of the Mexican-American child and to provide better understanding of the unique learning problems of this group of children.

  It should not be assumed that students who need compensatory education are inferior.

- Successful instructional practices and educational research findings from compensatory education programs should be incorporated into regular school programs.

- The State Department of Education's Office of Compensatory Education should be given sufficient authority to develop creative compensatory education programs.

CURRICULUM MODIFICATION FOR MEXICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS

It was reported that many of the difficulties in modifying educational programs in Mexican-American communities have been created because of the attitudes that still exist in some districts. Some teachers are reluctant to discard familiar techniques because modification or retooling for new ones entails an extra effort they are not yet willing to exert. Concern was expressed that some school boards might be reacting negatively to what they feel is an overemphasis on Mexican-American children. There is a reluctance to recognize the fact that the needs of Mexican-American students often are different from those of Anglo students and that it is necessary to provide for these differences in the instructional program. This situation may have come about because of a lack of effective communication between the Mexican-American community and the school. This was reported to be especially true in large districts where establishing communication generally takes longer. In light of the slow progress being made in enlightening the Anglo community about the Mexican-American educational problem, the conferees called for both immediate and long-range plans to change Anglo misconceptions and negative attitudes toward the problem.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS FOR MEXICAN-AMERICAN EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The major objective in the development of Mexican-American education programs must be the creation of quality education that provides opportunities for each Mexican-American student to develop his abilities and talent to the fullest extent possible. The curriculum of this educational program must develop the specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes through which the individual may attain socioeconomic security and at the same time make him capable of contributing to the improvement of his society. To achieve this broad general goal, the group called upon the schools to recognize the bicultural and bilingual factors that operate in the Mexican-American's education and to modify the instructional program accordingly. The following points need to be given serious consideration:

- Mexican-Americans are a very diverse group. Teachers must understand this diversity.

  Mexican-Americans differ because of their geographical origin (or that of their parents). The student born and partially reared in Mexico is different from one who originated in Texas,

California, or Arizona. The fact that he or his parents may have a rural orientation rather than an urban one will result in important differences.

Mexican-American students differ in their fluency with the English and Spanish languages. At one extreme is the student who speaks no English, and at the other extreme is the student who speaks no Spanish. Between these two extremes are found those who are adept at handling both languages and those who speak a nonstandard form of English and Spanish.

Mexican-Americans differ in their personal identification with Mexican culture. Some are knowledgeable about Mexico and exhibit traits, values, and customs of Hispanic origin; some have never had much contact with Mexican cultural influences or have parents who prefer to abandon or neglect the preservation of their Mexican cultural heritage.

Mexican-American students differ in socioeconomic background. Varying degrees of poverty and affluence, differences in the environment of the home itself, the vocational or professional level of the parents, and opportunities for the student to engage in enrichening experiences outside of school are all reflected in the Mexican-American student.

Mexican-American students differ in their psycho-cultural orientation. The way in which the Mexican-American child and his family perceive Anglo values and the way in which the Anglo community and his Anglo peers look upon Mexican-American values, his physical appearance, and his cultural background may lead to psychological conflict, and in turn may give rise to anxieties or feelings of hostility.

- Pride in the Mexican-American's heritage should be stimulated because it offers promise as a motivating force toward school achievement. The Mexican-American's cultural heritage also offers a great opportunity for achieving a richer society. Community resources such as tradition, folklore, and the history of Mexico and its contributions to American society should be used to promote pride in heritage. This will enable the student to see himself as one who has a responsible role to fill in the school, the home, and the community.

- There is a need to capitalize on and develop further the Mexican-American student's talent in using the Spanish language. Communication is the most important factor in understanding the many groups that make up our nation. Bilingualism is especially important in communication between people from different cultures. Thus, bilingualism is important for everyone -- not only for the Mexican-American student who must learn English along with his Spanish but also for his Anglo counterpart who should learn Spanish with his English. The Mexican-American student should be given recognition in the classroom for his

knowledge of Spanish. Many Mexican-American students do not exhibit their knowledge of Spanish through class participation because of the fear of making mistakes while using English. If they are given recognition for assisting in the teaching of Spanish, the entire class can benefit from bilingual instruction.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DIFFERENT LEVELS OF INSTRUCTION

Appropriate modification of the curriculum for students of Mexican descent was considered to be of central importance. The conferees considered the following to be minimal features of a good educational program for Mexican-American students:

- At the preschool level

  Emphasis on sequential language development activities for non-English speaking children

  Specific educational experiences that prepare children for success in school

  Individual attention through lower pupil-teacher ratios

  Diagnosis of health impediments to learning and attention to their correction

- At the elementary school level

  Maximum utilization of the knowledge and skills children acquire in preschool instructional programs

  Sound counseling of all students, including early (before the third grade) identification of talented youth, implemented by effective teaching practices

  Provision for experiential activities in hearing, speaking, reading, writing, and conceptualizing skills that make successful participation in all academic, aesthetic, and creative aspects of education possible

  Presentation of subject matter in the Spanish language, in accordance with ascertained needs, while children are receiving regular English instruction to ensure normal progress until adequate competency in English is achieved

  Insistence on the mastery of computational and language arts skills necessary for subsequent entry into higher education and complex technological, commercial, or professional occupations

Better articulation of English-as-a-second-language programs between elementary and secondary schools

Use of bilingual paraprofessional workers in the schools to assist teachers with Mexican-American students

Employment of a school-community relations coordinator to develop better liaison between the school and the Mexican-American community

- At the secondary school level

Provision for special English courses using modern linguistic techniques to break the language barrier that confronts many Mexican-American students

Provision for individual attention in all subject matter areas where language communication is a serious problem

The use of a tutorial system will greatly aid those Mexican-American high school students who find themselves handicapped by a lack of facility with English. Assistance of this type could also be extended into extracurricular activities so that language problems will not operate as a bar to participation in this segment of school life.

Increased attention to keeping the Mexican-American student in school and ensuring his satisfactory progress

Every effort must be made to assist in solving problems caused by a lack of self-confidence, feelings of inferiority, a lack of stimulation to obtain an education, lack of proper counseling, inability to accumulate the necessary credits for graduation, student finances, and so forth.

Recognition of the serious need for trained leadership among Mexican-Americans in the academic as well as in the cocurricular aspects of the school program

Capable students must be identified earlier, and every effort must be made to direct these students into productive and fruitful academic programs. Preconceived notions that Mexican-Americans are automatically directed into vocational or secretarial majors must be resisted.

Effective vocational programs for those who wish to use acquired skills immediately upon graduation

Equal educational opportunities demand quality programs for terminal students as well as college-bound students.

Development of problem-solving skills in all students

Because of the rapid change and increasing complexity of our American culture, the Mexican-American needs to learn to utilize his creative abilities in conjunction with his school-accumulated knowledge. He must learn to identify meaningful issues, determine the consequences of different judgments, discern the most effective solutions, and translate these into appropriate action.

A program of mature civic information that will develop insight into social and civic problems to enable students to participate as loyal and thoughtful citizens

- At the higher education level

While the number of Mexican-Americans with college training is growing, it is still pitifully small; in proportion to the general population increase, the Mexican-American population is even losing ground. Entry into the middle socioeconomic class and into community leadership positions is increasingly dependent upon suitable training and orientation in our colleges and universities. Bicultural groups generally become more fully "American" when they have representatives within the decision-making structure. Mexican-Americans have relatively few such representatives, and higher education is viewed as an important first step in producing trained leaders.

The problems of the Mexican-American in higher education are generally due to the rapid socioeconomic changes taking place and an adequate approach to the resultant conditions on the part of the various segments of higher education. For, while many colleges have a "melting-pot" admissions policy that provides for ethnic and racial quotas so that these groups are realistically represented on their campuses, too many colleges and universities fail to recognize the differences in students and, consequently, they do not structure the curriculum to meet the needs of the various ethnic groups. Even the junior colleges, which are supposed to provide terminal education as well as preparation for senior colleges, are leaning toward a liberal arts image that excludes many Mexican-American students. The junior colleges offer the best opportunity for Mexican-Americans to enter higher education, and it was recommended that the State Board of Education formulate administrative guidelines for more judicious use, location, and financing of junior college facilities in order to better serve the local community.

Another problem involved in getting more Mexican-Americans into college is that, for a number of reasons, they are not applying for available scholarships, loans, and grants. This is due, in part, to the failure of schools and colleges to furnish the Mexican-American community with adequate information about the available opportunities for financing higher education. Moreover, financial assistance to worthy needy students should be greatly broadened.

Specifically, the following were recommended for special attention:

Dramatize the plight of the Mexican-American in higher education.

Encourage Mexican-American students to take advantage of existing financial-aid programs, and actively explore means of expanding financial assistance to students from the Mexican-American community.

Press for formal commitment on the part of colleges and universities to institute programs that will meet the special educational needs of disadvantaged communities. Higher education personnel must actively recruit Mexican-American students and provide for realistic admission policies and conditions of successful study for them.

Formulate programs of compensatory education in higher education which will capitalize on the latent potential of human resources which are at present being choked off or only marginally tapped.

- At the adult education level

The Mexican-American student's success in school cannot be divorced from the educational background of his parents. Because of the lower educational attainment of many parents, the large number of families that speak only Spanish, the need for upgrading skills, and the serious health, social, economic, and legal problems that beset many Mexican-American communities, there is an obvious need for expanded adult education. What is not obvious to Mexican-American parents, however, is that their lack of knowledge and orientation to the American social and economic institutions hinders their children's learning. Unaware of school procedures and of the mundane problems their children face, many parents cannot adequately assist their children with schoolwork, counsel them outside the school, acquaint them with possible vocational goals for the future, encourage them to raise their aspirations, or suggest specific means of attaining higher goals. It is not a matter of "not caring," but rather a question of "not knowing how" to provide assistance to the young people.

There is need for both a far-reaching approach to home-school relationships and a program of basic adult education which will enable parents to cope more effectively with their own personal and family problems, to participate in the improvement of their neighborhood and the extended community, and to acquire the necessary knowledge and insights that can be used to reinforce the school's work with their children.

RELATED AREAS OF CONCERN

Those in attendance at the two conferences discussed the factors that they considered to be of vital importance to an effective instructional program.

It was their judgment that without serious attention to the following areas, the quality programs so urgently needed and desired could not be realized.

Counseling and Guidance

It was agreed that the counseling services available to Mexican-American students were far too limited to be effective. In one of the state's largest high schools with a heavy concentration of Mexican-American students, it was calculated that, on the average, each student was eligible for one hour and 45 minutes of counseling per year. Obviously, if one student required more than the average amount, another student would receive less. The group recommended that counseling programs in all schools be strengthened with such features as the following:

- Counseling should be available, with early involvement of the parents, from preschool to the university. The guidance program should have as its prime objectives the development of self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-confidence in these students of Mexican descent.

- A counselor's understanding of the student's socioeconomic status, degree of assimilation, verbal fluency (in English and Spanish), his ties with the Mexican culture, and so forth, will lessen the stereotyping of the Mexican-American and lead to better guidance practices.

- Valid and reliable instruments that take into account the Mexican-American student's culture and language should be used when gathering information for guidance purposes. Adequate instruments to determine the Mexican-American student's verbal skills, school achievement, self-image, and potential are not now being used extensively enough.

- Greater emphasis should be placed on identification of potential scholarship candidates. These students should be given proper guidance and courses of study that will lead to successful work in higher education.

- Counselors should be aware that too many Mexican-American students with potential in other areas have been guided into terminal vocational courses that have no value in today's labor market. Strong preapprenticeship programs, coordinated with industry or business, should be encouraged.

- Adequate counseling time should be made available for all students, and, since Mexican-American students constitute a highly disproportionate percent of dropouts, special intensive counseling time should be allowed for these potential dropouts.

- In communities where Spanish is a common language, there should be at least one Spanish-speaking counselor in the school to communicate effectively with the parents.

Staff and Staff-training Programs

It is readily apparent that the cultural differences that exist between the professional staff and the students (and their parents) will have important implications for the success of the entire system. It is vitally important that school personnel, especially the large number of those who come to California from school districts where the Mexican-American culture is unknown, be provided with an opportunity for gaining an understanding of this culture, since the educational performance of the Mexican-American student is directly related to his cultural background. Interpretation of the Mexican-American student's behavior and motivations may be conditioned by the staff member's own cultural background.

In light of these facts, it was urged that:

- Training programs for teachers who will work with Mexican-American students should include an opportunity for understanding the student's culture and the culture of the society in which the student is expected to function. Such understanding may reveal some of the student's handicaps in grasping the lesson, and the teacher can make the necessary adjustments in the instructional program so that the student can grasp the lesson with a minimum of cultural conflict.

- Increased use should be made of paraprofessional assistance in classrooms with Mexican-American students. The use of indigenous Spanish-speaking personnel as teacher-aides should enhance teacher effectiveness; thus their employment is strongly urged.

- School personnel should be so selected as to assure that staff members serving Mexican-American students will be sympathetic and sincerely committed to working effectively with these students.

- Not only teachers but also building principals, central office supervisors, and all other administrators need some orientation to the unique problems of Mexican-American students. Provisions for briefing them on these problems should be made.

- Mexican-American leaders in the community should be used as consultants, visiting lecturers, and sources of information to the school. They can also serve as models and inspiration for the students.

School-community Relations

In many Mexican-American homes, there is no real awareness of what is going on in the school; consequently, parental conception of the school's role may be unrealistic. This lack of awareness results from a communications gap between the school and the community -- a gap which is often the cause of misunderstanding and resentment toward the school. The absence of complaints by Mexican-American parents or community organizations is often regarded as evidence of harmonious school-community relations, when,

in fact, it may be an indication of frustration and rejection of the schools by parents who are unable to communicate with the school. This may be especially true in communities where built-in barriers of language and cultural differences (as well as social and economic differences) exist. For this reason, the group strongly recommended that:

- Someone from the school should be assigned the responsibility for liaison between the school and the community. The size of the district may require the efforts of more than one individual.

- Those charged with school-community relations in Mexican-American neighborhoods should be knowledgeable about the Mexican-American culture and the Spanish language if they are to carry out their assignments effectively.

- Neighborhood school advisory councils should be created to establish a sound and meaningful dialogue with the school. Effective utilization of existing community groups is another means to the same end.

It is evident that further research and study must be conducted in this vital and complex area of education; however, educators in attendance at the Lake Arrowhead and Anaheim conferences urged that serious consideration be given to the earliest possible implementation of the recommendations embodied in this report.

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